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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a participative model of strategic planning for use by higher education institutions. First it reviews five principles or assumptions of a participatory model: the person doing the job is the expert; that which is strategic must be validated by the operation; accountability, authority, and information are always equal and proceed in that order; no one can participate in decision-making outside of their area of accountability, authority, or information; and decisions should be made at the point of action). The paper then discusses different types of planning and reviews 10 steps for effective strategic planning at higher education institutions: (1) preparation and communication; (2) collection and analysis of data; (3) selection of the planning team; (4) conducting the first planning session; (5) communicating the draft plan; (6) action plan teams; (7) conducting the second planning session; (8) preparing the summary plan for board of trustees approval; (9) implementation; and (10) annual updates. (MDM)

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Strategic Planning: A Participative Model

ED 390 324

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Abstract

In this era of reduced budgets, increasing competition, and growing questions about the value of higher education, the need for strategic planning has become more important than ever. The discipline and basic components of strategic planning are beginning to be documented in the academic literature while institutions of higher education have started to embrace the concept. While every institution is unique, strategic planning adheres to several basic important guidelines. Successful planning models depend on the emphasis and organization of the particular steps. Moreover, using the past to build for the future preserves the history and integrity of the institution. In addition, full participation and communication by members of the community serve as a uniting force within the process. Strategic planning transforms the basic fabric of the organization by opening lines of communication for decision-making and allowing greater participation in planning for the future of the institution.

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Introduction

Strategic planning embraces the fact that the past has a conflict with the future and this creates the present. Nothing creative happens until energy is forced into it. These two ideas are united when strategic planning is used to leverage an organization. Strategic

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planning is a freeing agent, producing a release of energy which will either dissipate or be controlled to be creative. Controlling the planning process once it has started is just as important as developing it initially.

A process involving comprehensive participation by the college community is difficult to enact and control. It must not be developed as just another process within an organization already burdened with too many processes. Successful strategic planning must become part of the every day working environment and structure of the institution. This is a slow transformation but to be truly effective, strategic planning must become ingrained in the decision-making system of the institution, the budget process, goal setting, and departmental planning.

Strategic planning redefines what is realistic. Therefore, leaders, not managers, must lead strategic planning. They must be chosen through internal support systems and not simply assigned to this task. These are key elements when opting for a participative process.

Strategic Planning

Five Principles (Assumptions) of Participatory Style

1. The person doing the job is the expert. The person is responsible to the institution and there is reciprocity, the institution is responsible to the person.
2. That which is strategic must be validated by the operation; anything which is operational must have a strategic content. Strategies must be developed before a participatory style is possible.
3. Accountability, Authority, and Information are always equal and proceed in that order. The person accountable for a task has the authority (resources), and will provide the information.
4. No one can participate in decision-making outside of his/her area of accountability, authority, or information.
5. Decisions should be made at the point of action.

Accountability is not shared, although different levels of accountability may be assigned.

Strategic planning is a continuous process. While there is no appeal procedure in strategic planning there is self-correction. When a decision is made, the system supports it, placing all resources and information at the disposal of decision makers. In addition, the administration must support strategic planning or it will not be successful. A failed attempt at strategic planning will create so much cynicism that it will be a long time before support exists for another attempt at planning.

Types of Planning: How to Start

Strategic planning is not the answer to all the problems within an institution. In fact, strategic planning works most efficiently when it is implemented during of times of stability. This proactive approach will prove to be valuable during times of crises. In addition, strategic planning should also be implemented in conjunction with other methods of planning, including the following:

* Long-range planning -- start with environmental scanning
* Program planning -- start with task identification
* Comprehensive planning -- start with the budget
* Strategic planning -- define common values

Strategic Planning: The Discipline and Process

In strategic planning the process and the discipline are two different entities. The basic elements listed below comprise the strategic planning discipline. The process is the full implementation and specific ordering of the strategic planning steps. A strategic plan will only remain a piece of paper until it is implemented into the classroom. The process is the strength of the plan. With strategic planning the most trouble, as well as most success, occurs after the plan has been developed and implementation takes place. (This is where the vision becomes a reality.)

Strategic Planning Discipline

1. **Preparation and Communication:** There are two phases necessary in the early stages of strategic planning: preparation and communication. The college community must be active participants in the development of any strategic planning process. This obviously promotes ownership but it also helps everyone understand the system while becoming acquainted with the definitions and overall procedures. Moreover, this process of communication helps build support and prepares the community for the work to come. This is a vital step and should not be minimized.

2. **Collect data--Internal/external Analysis:** An important early step is the evaluation of the current state of affairs. The process of examining the external environment (expert analysis and environmental scanning) and internal environment (assessment and institutional research) should produce an in-depth analysis utilizing the expertise of a multiplicity of individuals and comprehensive measures.

3. **Select the Planning Team:** A Planning Team is selected based on a combination of roles and characteristics of individuals. A matrix method of determining individuals on the Planning Team is a good way of selecting the team members. One axis of the matrix contains the various roles (student, faculty, dean, parent, alumni, etc.) and the other axis contains the characteristics (male/female, traditional age/older student, white/non-white, etc.). The Planning Team is chosen to represent the entire college, not specific interest groups, but is intended to reflect different perspectives within the college.

4. **Conduct first planning session:** At a two- or three-day retreat, this group will work intensely to develop a set of core beliefs, a working mission statement and a set of parameters, conduct internal and external analyses, an analysis of the competition, an organizational critique, define the critical issues, formulate objectives, and design strategies to meet those objectives. These components comprise the basis of the draft strategic plan. This process is common to all forms of strategic planning, what differs is the involvement of diverse members of the community.

5. **Communicate Draft Plan:** The result of the planning retreat is formulated into a document and distributed to the entire college community. As in the initial stages of communication, the facilitators disseminate this document as widely as possible. The facilitators continue to explain further the process and serve as sources of information while answering questions.

6. **Action Plan Teams:** The Planning Team discussed above formulates the vision of what the college will become. Concrete action steps are necessary to make the vision a reality. The bridge between the vision and the reality is a set of Action Plans developed by the Action Teams, one organized around each of the strategies. Every Action Team is composed of members from all areas of the college and community, experts in their fields and responsible for daily operations related to the strategies. The Action Teams are charged with the mission of formulating plans to carry out the strategies. Specific steps for each Action Plan are identified, along with cost-benefit analyses.

7. **Conduct second planning session:** The Planning Team reconvenes at a second retreat to review the Action Plans. Options available to the team are to accept, reject, or send back the plans to the Action Teams for more information or revisions. The plans returned to the Action Teams for revision are reviewed at a third Planning Team retreat, where they are accepted or rejected. The Planning Team then prioritizes the Action Plans.

8. **Prepare the summary plan for Board of Trustees approval:** In the final analysis, the leadership of the college is responsible for the functioning of the institution and must approve or reject the strategic plan. The strategic plan is presented with full financial disclosure at this time.

9. **Implementation:** After the plans are decided upon and prioritized, a series of Job Accountability workshops are conducted, where the work of each plan is assigned to individuals who are then held accountable for their completion. This process is done vertically and horizontally within the institution, bringing the functions of the individuals in

line with the goals of the strategic plan. This is a crucial step that sees the full realization of strategic planning.

10. **Annual updates:** The plan is established for a five-year period, and the Planning Team convenes on an annual basis, reviewing the progress of the plans and making adjustments as necessary in a process of continuous improvement. The planning process becomes a transformation of the college. Planning becomes tied to the accountability of the individuals and the departments, and becomes the driving force behind the budget process.

This form of strategic planning is a comprehensive and truly participative process. It is related directly to the mission of the college while being associated with the yearly goals. It has led to improved institutional effectiveness and worked to ensure that the college will continue to achieve its goals while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Reference

Cook, W.J., (1990). Strategic Planning for America's Schools. Cambridge Management Group, Inc.

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